

## **COUNCIL PRESIDENT COMMENTARY (July 2021)**

### Looking Back on the First Half of 2021

As we have passed the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday, it's appropriate to look back on the last six months of 2021 and what Talbot County Government and the Talbot County Council have accomplished. This has been an exciting time for me as Council President and while there have been challenges to address, there have also been many successes to celebrate.

Talbot County's departments and agencies have been busy working to serve the needs of the community through a strategic initiative addressing issues surrounding *"People, Projects, and Processes."* I have been overwhelmed by the progress being made by our employees in the County. Although there are many initiatives underway, the following provides a small snapshot of what has been accomplished in the past six months.

### **People**

- **Senior Staffing** - Key senior-level positions have been filled with highly qualified candidates. We are fortunate to have attracted both Joye Nagle as our Finance Director and David Edwards as our Human Resources Director both of whom bring a significant amount of experience in their fields of expertise.
- **Law Enforcement** - Application approval and submission have been accomplished to bring the Talbot County Sheriff's deputies into the State Law Enforcement Officers' Pension System (LEOPS) to enhance both Retention and Recruitment of deputies for Talbot County.
- **Emergency Medical Services (EMS)** - The Department of Emergency Services, Emergency Medical Services division has begun an important process of hiring four additional EMS personnel to expand EMS coverage to 12 hours each day to maintain quick response times to medical emergencies in the county. This is Phase One of a two-year expansion of EMS services. Year two will be the construction of an EMS station in the northern end of the county with coverage expanding to 24 hours per day.

### **Projects**

- **9-1-1 Services** - The Emergency Services department (9-1-1) has just completed the installation of a new 9-1-1 emergency telephone system which allows communications specialists to use advanced technology to better locate and provide assistance to people requesting 9-1-1 responses.
- **Public Works** - The Public Works department remains busy on many fronts. Staff has recently completed the comprehensive 10-year update to the Talbot County Solid Waste and Recycling Management Plan which was approved by the County Council in July. Additionally, the construction bid has been awarded to provide sewer service to the Community Center which is slated for completion in the next several months.
- **Roads** - The Roads department remains busy addressing general road repairs, many storm drain culvert replacements, as well as completed leveling and paving upgrades to roads, such as sections of Black Dog Alley, Chapel Road, Bellevue Road, Dogwood View Drive, Whitetail Drive, Copperville Road and parts of Bruffs Island Road with more to come.

- **Communication** - As part of an effort to improve communication, the Information Technology department has completed an upgrade to the Talbot County Government website to better represent County government services. Moving forward efforts to enhance cybersecurity are underway.

### **Processes**

- **Education and Training** - The Administrative Services department has established an online learning management system for use by County employees. This system includes learning sessions on personnel equity and equality, occupational safety and health, customer service as well as a myriad of other more specific lessons for employees.
- **Customer Services** - Efforts are underway by the Planning and Zoning department to initiate a strategic planning process over the next several months with internal and external stakeholders to streamline processes to better utilize personnel and service customers. This effort includes the implementation of a new software application to better manage processes.
- **Grant Support** - The Economic Development and Tourism department, with the support of the Finance and the Grants Coordinator, continues to successfully support the distribution of pandemic-related grant funds to support individuals and businesses which will continue into the foreseeable future.
- **Pandemic Response** - The Department of Emergency Services Emergency Management division and agencies and organizations continued to facilitate community coordination efforts around COVID information, including sharing vaccination sites, grant coordination and distribution, and other activities to support the community.

Finally, the Council was able to meet in person with the public again for the first time in June. At these meetings, we finalized the County budget for fiscal year July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. The approved current expense budget totals \$112,815,596 which represents an increase of 16.85 percent. Included in the budget is a transfer of \$10,000,000 to the Capital Projects Fund to fund County projects including EMS stations, Broadband expansion, road upgrades, and replacement of the Easton High School roof. Public safety and infrastructure/facilities investments are the priorities of the budget, as mentioned above, and also include funding the first phase of the design and construction of a new Public Safety facility for the County.

Exciting things are happening in Talbot County and I am happy to share with you our mid-year progress.

Over the summer months, I hope you enjoy reuniting with family and friends again. We look forward to sharing more progress with you in the fall as we regain more normalcy in our work and personal lives in the coming days.

Chuck Callahan, Talbot County Council President